

Global Power Shifts, Rational Choice and Role Conflict: Explaining the Trajectories of the Central Maghreb Countries' EU Policies since 2011

Irene Fernández-Molina*

*Lecturer in International Relations, University of Exeter

This paper will seek to trace and explain the diverging and non-linear trajectories of the three central Maghreb countries' foreign policies towards the European Union (EU) since the 2011 Arab uprisings. Firstly, the analysis will be situated within the big structural picture and debates about the putative decline of the Western-based liberal international order, including the EU's influence over its outer periphery or neighbourhood, although emphasis will be subsequently placed on the "southern agency" manifested by Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria in this structural context. Secondly, some background will be provided regarding the longstanding features of Maghreb-EU relations and the factors that account for them globally, as well as for each individual state's bilateral differentiation in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This will include an examination of postcolonial legacies, the debate on the degree of dependence or interdependence that characterises the EU-Maghreb relationship from an international political economy perspective, the realist hindrances to liberal region-building between the Maghreb countries themselves, and the history-dependent allocation of foreign policy roles and bilateral differentiation, which has been further emphasised by the ENP since 2004-2005.

Thirdly, change and continuity in the Tunisia, Moroccan and Algerian post-2011 bilateral trajectories vis-à-vis the EU will be analysed by contrasting various theory-based perspectives and explanatory factors, i.e. economic dependence (international political economy) or interdependence (neoliberalism), global power shifts (neorealism), national security, territoriality and sovereignty (classical realism), and national identities and foreign policy roles (constructivism). The analytical method employed for explaining the diverging trajectories of the Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan foreign policies towards the EU since 2011 will be process tracing. This involves a systematic scrutiny of sequences or chains of phenomena that unfold over time with the aim of evaluating the alternative causal explanations of change that are embedded in existing narratives. Therefore, the first step in the analysis will be to reconstruct the time sequence of events, interactions and decisions in each Maghreb country's post-2011 bilateral relationship with the EU, identifying turning points or junctures. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn as to which factors constitute drivers of change or continuity in each country's EU policy, which of them account for specific turning points in the bilateral trajectories and the extent to which some of the processes identified may represent instances of "de-Europeanisation".

A Declining Western-Based Liberal International Order and EU Influence over its Neighbourhood

Nearly a decade into the 2008 global economic and financial crisis, the coincidence of the United States (US)' announced withdrawal from various international agreements under the Trump presidency (Bump, 2018) and the United Kingdom's vote to leave the EU has pushed the hitherto scholarly debate about the decline of the so-called liberal international order (Acharya, 2014) to the press headlines and public discussion. The realisation of the "rise of the non-West" – or the "rise of the rest" – in global politics and more recent concerns about the apparent beginning, in both the West and the non-West, of the "reverse wave" of the "third wave of democratisation" initiated in the mid-1970s (Huntington, 1991) are also part of the picture. The liberal international order is the set of arrangements that were put in place in 1945 by the Western victors of World War II, under US leadership, in order to organise relations among themselves and their allies around "economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation and democratic solidarity" (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 7). In its increasingly global institutional dimension, this has been most prominently embodied in the United Nations (UN) and the UN system, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its post-1994 successor the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the Bretton Woods institutions, i.e. the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – all of which share the US provision of "global public goods" as their common denominator (Nye, 2017).

While the liberal international order had an in-built expansionist tendency from the outset, it was the end of the Cold War that allowed it to outgrow its original half of the bipolar system and acquire a truly global reach. Seventy years later, however, the widespread sense that its foundations are trembling has gone as far as to make all theoretical schools of International Relations (IR) for once concur on a diagnosis: "That world order is at a crossroads, and that there is no sign marked 'straight ahead'" (Duncombe & Dunne, 2018, p. 31). Current debates question what is in crisis exactly: are we witnessing a crisis of authority, i.e. of the US post-1945 and post-1991 hegemonic leadership; of internationalism as a pre-existing, two-century-old political vision for peaceful and law-based relations between sovereign states; or of liberalism as the theoretical, normative and ideological substratum underpinning the latter together with its domestic dimension? These three elements should not be conflated and may be actually detaching from one another.

What is the place of the EU and its southern neighbours of the Maghreb in this big global story? To start with, 1945's Western Europe and its successive incarnations, the European Economic

Community (EEC) and the EU, have been the primary partners for the US – along with Japan – in the construction and upholding of the liberal international order. Europe being “the quiet bulwark of the wider international order” (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 7), the five convictions that have for decades sustained the latter are the very same ones that lie at the heart of the European integration project: trade openness, rules-based multilateral governance, security cooperation and community-building, reformism and a liberal democratic vision of progress (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 11). This also applies to the various policies and cooperation frameworks that the EU has set up over the years in order to deal with its Southern Mediterranean neighbours, most notably the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the 2004 ENP.

Devised during the golden age of the EU’s region-building optimism with the promise of forging a novel “Mediterranean” regional identity that would cut across taken-for-granted geopolitical divides, the EMP was a distinctly liberal policy in its transformation ambitions for Southern Mediterranean countries. The envisaged “area of shared prosperity, peace and stability” (Council of the European Union, 1995) was supposed to rest on three mutually reinforcing liberal – if not neoliberal – logics: economic reform driven by trade opening and liberalisation, political reform in the direction of democratisation, and regional cooperation through multilateralism (Solingen & Ozyurt, 2006, pp. 58-66). An excess of wishful thinking was noted from the outset by more realist-minded observers, who pointed to the structural asymmetry of the Mediterranean North-South relationship and the hegemonic nature of the policies of the EU (Attinà, 2003; Philippart, 2003), a “half-way hegemon” applying a “half-way hegemonic strategy” (Costalli, 2009, p. 324). Ten years later, the ENP broadened the geographical scope of EU action and shifted the emphasis from multilateral region-building to differentiated bilateralism (Bicchi, Noutcheva & Voltolini, 2018), but remained similarly liberal in its underlying assumptions. The most important of these was a trust in the EU’s attraction force and capacity to exert substantial influence in its outer periphery, based not only on its material capabilities, enabling various forms of conditionality, but also on its distinctive “normative power” (Manners, 2002). By the time the Arab uprisings broke out in 2010-2011, both the multilateralism/socialisation approach of the EMP and differentiated bilateralism/conditionality approach of the ENP had already shown their flaws and limitations. The EMP had been replaced by a more functionalist and allegedly de-politicised Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) back in 2008, while a first review of the ENP was also underway.

Still, as outlined in the joint communication “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood”, the 2011 review of the ENP was marked by overall continuity in terms of both goals and methods. If anything, the EU’s stronger emphasis on “democratic transformation” (European Commission, 2011a, p. 3) and providing “greater support to partners engaged in building deep democracy – the kind that lasts” (European Commission, 2011b, p. 2) acted as a late reminder of the liberal values that were

expected to lie at the heart of the EU's external action. Yet, overall, it can be contended that the EU's strategic responses to the Arab uprisings under the ENP framework were weighed down by "inherent contradictions and lack of innovation in relation to past policies," which "eventually deprived them of the value-based and progressive effect envisaged on paper" (Fernández-Molina, 2017a, p. 303). In more recent years, as the promised "ring of friends" turned into a "ring of fire" to both the East and the South of the EU (Taylor, 2015), the EU institutions could no longer hide from the fact that the ENP had been largely ineffective, if not a failure, as a "structural foreign policy" (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014, p. 28). This was compounded with the realisation of the decline of the EU's own influence over its neighbourhood, in comparison to the growing clout of other powerful "neighbours of the neighbours" (Gstöhl & Lannon, 2018) such as Russia (Ghanem & Kuznetsov, 2018) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Schumacher & Fernández Molina, 2013), and as part of the wider weakening of the Western-based liberal international order.

A second review of the ENP released in 2015 was to acknowledge for the first time that "the EU cannot alone solve the many challenges of the region, and there are limits to its leverage" (European Commission, 2015, p. 2). This newfound modesty led the EU institutions to announce that "the new ENP will now seek to involve other regional actors, beyond the neighbourhood, where appropriate, in addressing regional challenges" (European Commission, 2015, p. 3). At the same time, an apparent retreat of the EU from its role as the promoter of the liberal international order in its neighbourhood was also originating from the inside. The joint communication presenting the 2015 ENP review denied any tension between values and interests in EU foreign policy: "The EU will pursue its interests which include the promotion of universal values" (European Commission, 2015, p. 2). However, the reality was that, despite this attempt to square the circle in line with the "principled pragmatism" advocated in the 2016 EU Global Strategy (Juncos, 2017), priority clearly lay with interests. Furthermore, democracy and human rights goals were explicitly portrayed as subject to co-ownership with each of the mostly authoritarian neighbours of the EU: "The ENP will seek more effective ways to promote reforms with each partner *in mutually agreed formats*." "Human rights and democracy will continue to be an agenda item in our political dialogue with all partners *in mutually agreed formats*" (European Commission, 2015, p. 5, 6, emphasis added). In sum, the wane of the liberal international order is not just associated to the relative power loss, reconsideration of internationalism and erosion of some liberal values on the side of the US; the same processes seem to be underway in EU foreign policy in general and the ENP in particular.

The Longstanding Features of Maghreb-EU Relations

Turning our gaze to the *longue durée*, when it comes to the Maghreb states, the longstanding EU/European influence has unmistakably colonial roots. All of the core characteristics of the EU-

Maghreb relationship(s) that persist until today were shaped by the processes of colonisation and decolonisation of the 19th and 20th centuries. What is more, the structural features of the Maghreb in itself cannot be understood without European penetration either. French colonialism moulded the international political economy of this region by orienting trade and capital flows across the Mediterranean in a vertical, hub-and-spoke fashion. Indeed, to date, each country's separate vertical North-South exchanges continue to overshadow and hinder horizontal South-South flows in the Maghreb. Moreover, their trade relationships with the EU have constantly displayed a strong asymmetry between the respective weights of bilateral trade for each of the sides (Fernández-Molina, 2018a, pp. 325-327). In 2017 the EU was the largest trading partner for all of the five Maghreb countries and the source or recipient of over 50% of the total trade with the world of all but Mauritania. By contrast, the Maghreb countries – including both “oil haves” and “oil have-nots” – occupied almost insignificant positions (1% of total trade at the most) in the ranking of the EU's top trading partners.

Table 1. Share (%) of trade with EU-28 in the Maghreb countries' total trade with the world (2017)

	Imports	Exports	Total trade
Algeria	43.7	58.9	50.3
Libya	26.7	67.4	54.9
Mauritania	28.5	35.0	27.4
Morocco	56.5	64.6	59.4
Tunisia	53.5	78.0	63.2

Source: European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/statistics/index_en.htm), data processed by author

Table 2. Share (%) of trade with Maghreb countries in EU-28's total trade with the world (2017)

	Imports	Exports	Total trade
Algeria	1.0	1.0	1.0
Libya	0.6	0.2	0.4
Mauritania	0.0	0.0	0.0
Morocco	0.8	1.2	1.0
Tunisia	0.5	0.6	0.6

Source: European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/statistics/index_en.htm), data processed by author

The big debate that stems from this data asks whether the overall structural nature of the Maghreb-EU economic relationship is better described by the liberal concept of interdependence, which broadly

refers to the interconnection and mutual reliance between international actors, or the post-Marxist notion of dependency, which stresses the imbalance between two unequal parties, a centre-periphery pattern of domination and exploitation of the peripheral economy, and common interests between the capitalist centre and the peripheral “clienteles class”. One mixed answer argues that, while displaying some symptoms of dependency, the Maghreb’s relationship with Europe is mainly one of “high asymmetrical interdependence”, for “both parties would incur costs if the relationship were broken” (Aghrout, 2000, pp. 14-16). Potential costs for the European side would affect mainly energy security – i.e. the provision of natural gas by Algeria, the EU’s third largest supplier after Russia and Norway, and a vital one for Spain, Italy, Portugal and France – and, beyond the economic sphere, security and migration control.

From a liberal interdependence approach, these structural conditions have logically played a major role in perpetuating the exceptionally low level of transnational economic and social connection, let alone regional integration, which can be observed among the Maghreb countries. At the same time, realist IR theory also has much to say about the bleak history of Maghrebi regionalism and the role of inter-state security dilemmas therein. The interesting fact is that such durable mistrust has been to a large extent associated with bilateral territorial disputes that originated in colonial border redrawing, as well as the ensuing decolonisation and state-building processes. The postcolonial legacy of French remapping included the only direct armed conflict between Morocco and Algeria, i.e. the 1963 Sands War. On a related note, while the size of its territory and the energy resources discovered in the 1950s made it the ideal candidate for this role, independent Algeria failed to ever become a distinct regional hegemon (Fernández-Molina, 2018a, p. 325). As a result, competition for regional hegemony and power balancing dynamics were to characterise international relations within the Maghreb system unceasingly for decades, albeit falling short of armed conflict in most cases. These tensions have been described as a “harmless game” for the incumbent regimes; that is, one that “allows them at the same time to survive domestic crises, strengthen the institutions they defend or embody and, ultimately, maintain a relatively controlled pragmatic balance” (Hami, 2003, pp. 18-19). The main exception to this harmlessness has been the protracted conflict of Western Sahara, caused by a deviant and thwarted decolonisation process in the wake of the Spanish withdrawal in 1975-1976, and pitting Morocco against the pro-independence Polisario Front, supported by Algeria. This remains a huge stumbling block impeding Maghrebi region-building in spite of being frozen since 1991.

From a constructivist perspective, the legacy of colonisation and decolonisation in the Maghreb includes two contradictory identity-based factors that continue to constrain relations within the region as well as with Europe: the norm of regional federation or unification consolidated in the times of parallel anticolonial struggles, and each state’s individual nationalism and foreign policy roles embedded during the postcolonial state- and nation-building processes (Stora, 2003). The latter

converge with political economy factors associated with natural resource endowment – the “structure-identity nexus” (Daoudy, 2016) – in explaining the longstanding differentiation between the various Maghreb countries’ bilateral relationships with the EU. Three distinct roles may be distinguished in this respect from the 1960s-1970s until at least the first decade of the 2000s: two aspiring “model students of the EU” (Tunisia and Morocco), a “bad student” (Algeria) and a “rogue state” that was in the process of being “reintegrated” into the international community at the turn of the millennium (Libya). Not coincidentally, it is “oil have-nots” that have historically tended to behave as “model students” by pursuing consistently cooperative trajectories vis-à-vis the EU, while “oil haves” have displayed a more selective, pragmatic and at times uninterested behaviour (Fernández-Molina, 2018a, pp. 328-329). In conclusion, “geographical differentiation” (Barbé & Herranz-Surrallés, 2012, p. 3) in Maghreb-EU relations predated by far the ENP’s emphasis on differentiated bilateralism. What the latter did was mostly to consolidate and somewhat rejuvenate the divergent paths already travelled by Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.

Explaining the Post-2011 Bilateral Trajectories and Turning Points

Against this backdrop, and in spite of the aforementioned continuity bias in EU foreign policy and the ENP, the 2011 Arab uprisings did bring some novelties to Maghreb-EU relations. There was no major policy discontinuity as such but, at least in the short term, some readjustments appeared to be imperative on both sides of the bilateral relationships between Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, on the one hand, and the EU, on the other. This section aims to establish the sequence of events and timeline of these three countries’ relations with the EU in the aftermath of such a turbulent year, as the basis for subsequent process tracing.

In the case of Tunisia, the only central Maghreb country where the 2011 uprising turned into a full-blown revolution resulting in regime change, the main milestones of the relationship with the EU can be found in 2011, 2012, 2014-2015 and 2018. In 2011, the rapidly changing tone of the EU’s declaratory diplomacy in the midst of the revolution – with joint statements by the High Representative (HR/VP) Catherine Ashton and the Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP Štefan Füle moving from tepid calls for “restraint in the use of force” to expressions of “support and recognition to the Tunisian people and their democratic aspirations” – ended up in Brussels’ promise, in mid-February, to act as “Tunisia’s strongest ally in their move towards democracy” (Fernández-Molina, 2017a, pp. 307-308). The first formalisation of such backing involving some Tunisian political input, in the autumn of the same year, was the establishment of an EU-Tunisia Task Force, co-chaired by the HR/VP and the interim Tunisian Prime Minister Beji Caid el Sebsi, with the aim of coordinating European financial support for the Tunisian transition. Among other things, Tunisia was selected as one of the four recipients of the funding of the brand new Support to Partnership, Reforms

and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) programme, which the EU launched for this purpose under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). This was followed by the dispatch of an EU Election Observation Mission to monitor the inaugural Tunisian Constituent Assembly elections of October 2011.

2012 was the year of the institutionalisation of the EU's recognition for Tunisia as the "success story" of the "Arab Spring" within bilateral relations. This occurred in two parallel ways, both in the framework of the ENP and by decision of the bilateral EU-Tunisia Association Council (i.e. involving joint ownership) in November that year: by concluding a new ENP Action Plan to replace the one from July 2005 and by establishing a special bilateral relationship – however symbolic and unclear in terms of added value – in the form of the so-called Privileged Partnership. Although the former was actually part of a scheduled renewal across all ENP countries, in the Tunisian case it was presented as the "Privileged Partnership's Action Plan" (Council of the EU, 2012); that is, the policy materialisation of the stepping up and new era of the bilateral relationship. The 2012 milestone was also preceded by a visit to Tunis of the President of the European Commission (EC) Jean-Claude Juncker in late October. Subsequently, 2014-2015 saw more specific advances in pursuance of the "three Ms" (European Council, 2011) promised by the 2011 joint communication "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" (European Commission, 2011a, p. 3). While the SPRING programme had already provided Tunisia with additional EU "money", the post-2011 "mobility" agenda led to the conclusion of an EU-Tunisia Mobility Partnership in 2014, with negotiations on visa facilitation scheduled to begin in 2016. As regards the new EU "market" incentive, i.e. the offer of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) to four Southern Mediterranean frontrunners, it resulted in a negotiation process being initiated between Tunisia and the EC in 2015.

A series of incremental steps followed in 2016, including the release of the joint communication Strengthening EU Support for Tunisia (European Commission, 2016) – the first of its kind focusing on a specific southern neighbourhood country –, the launch of the EU-Tunisia Joint Parliamentary Committee, the establishment of a two-year temporary zero-duty tariff quota for Tunisian olive oil imports into the European Single Market, and the full association of Tunisia to the EU research programme Horizon 2020 (Cohen-Hadria, 2018, p.23). Finally, 2018 was announced as the year of the awaited quantum leap in the Tunisia-EU relationship, as reflected in HR/VP Federica Mogherini's statement stressing that "2018 should not be, and cannot be, just another year in our bilateral relations" (European External Action Service, 2018). In the Association Council session of November 2018, Tunisia ended up jointly adopting with the EU Partnership Priorities, i.e. the new bilateral policy instrument envisaged by the 2015 review of the ENP, in replacement of former Action Plans, in order to specify "commonly identified shared interests" (European Commission, 2015, p. 4, 19) –

although in this particular case the document was referred to as “Strategic Priorities for 2018-2020” (Official Journal of the European Union, 2018). Based on this linear, positive trajectory of the bilateral relationship, the question now remains open as to whether Tunisia’s special status and ambition should involve “[outgrowing] the limits of the ENP” or the latter remains “the relevant framework” (Cohen-Hadria, 2018, p. 9).

In Morocco, the 2011 protests were met with a series of top-down responses from the monarchy, including a swift constitutional reform, which succeeded in deactivating domestic unrest and ensuring regime continuity. “Business as usual” similarly prevailed in relations with the EU, which unreservedly praised monarchical reformism to the detriment of the Moroccan opposition (Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 147-148). The post-uprisings landmarks in this relationship were to be found in 2011, 2013 and 2015-2016. In 2011, the country was able to jump on the bandwagon of the rewards/incentives offered by the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity to those southern neighbours most engaged in “democratic transformation”, in spite of the absence of structural domestic political change. To begin with, Morocco was included as a recipient in the SPRING financial programme. However, the unwavering EU recognition and support had to coexist with the shocking news that the European Parliament withheld consent to the protocol of extension of the 2006 EU-Morocco fisheries partnership agreement in December 2011. Such unheard-of development was partly motivated by the doubtful legality of the agreement’s de facto application to the territorial waters of Moroccan-annexed Western Sahara, which has a distinct status under international law as a non-self-governing territory (Fernández-Molina, 2017b, pp. 229-233) – a problem that extended to most bilateral economic and sectoral cooperation deals between Morocco and the EU, and was to usher in a new era of judicial battle led by the Polisario Front in the EU courts. Still, the European Parliament’s “no” vote as such was just relative hurdle, as demonstrated by the immediate start of negotiations on a new fisheries protocol and the same body’s consent, in February 2012, to the 2010 EU-Morocco agricultural trade agreement, which presented similar legal issues in relation to Western Sahara.

Next, 2013 was to be a year of achievements and progress in Morocco’s cooperation with the EU, including the launch of DCFTA negotiations, the conclusion of an EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership and the adoption of the second EU-Morocco ENP Action Plan – either preceding or following similar steps in Tunisia-EU relations – as well as the conclusion of a new fisheries protocol that was this time smoothly approved by the European Parliament. By contrast, a deep bilateral crisis broke out in 2015-2016 owing to the first fruits of the new judicial route pursued by the Polisario Front as part of its “low politics” international strategy. Two consecutive rulings on the same case by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) annulled the implementation of the EU-Morocco agricultural trade agreement in Western Sahara (judgement of the General Court, December 2015) and finally

established that the deal simply does not apply there because Western Sahara is not legally part of Moroccan territory (final appeal ruling by Grand Chamber, December 2016). This turn of events dealt a severe blow to Moroccan foreign policy, which was now entering uncharted territory plagued with dilemmas. For the first time it was domestically felt that the country could have to choose between an ever-closer relationship with the EU and the nearly sacred cause of national territorial integrity enshrining the Moroccanity of Western Sahara (Fernández-Molina, 2017c, p. 190). Furthermore, another CJEU ruling with an analogous argumentation was to judge the EU-Morocco fisheries partnership agreement likewise inapplicable to Western Sahara's waters in July 2018 (Fernández-Molina & Ojeda-García, 2019). As things stand at present, while two new bilateral agreements on agricultural trade and fisheries replacing those affected by the 2015-2016 and 2018 CJEU rulings have been negotiated with the EC and approved by the European Parliament in early 2019, the persistent inclusion of Western Sahara in their geographical scope of application and the questionable impartiality of the consultation process with which the EU institutions expect to have fulfilled the legal requirement to obtain the "consent" of the people of Western Sahara foretell further Polisario-led judicial battles in the CJEU and Morocco-EU diplomatic crises.

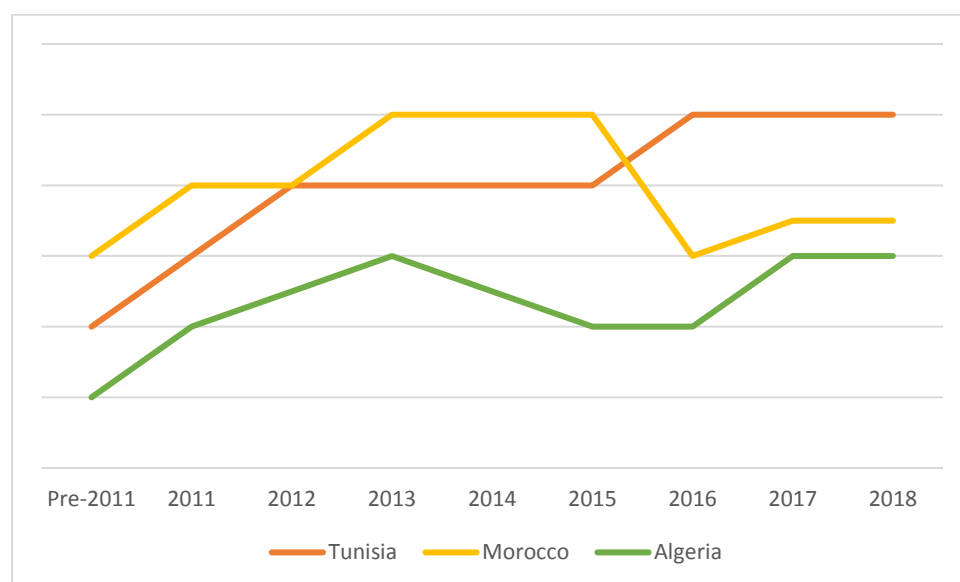
In the case of Algeria, the limited national version of the 2011 Arab uprisings resulted in regime continuity, as in Morocco, yet the initial EU response was notably more lukewarm due to the awkward and unsteady historical background of bilateral relations. The subsequent bilateral milestones would be 2011-2012, 2015-2016 and 2017. In 2011, Brussels welcomed the lifting of the state of emergency and other political reforms announced by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April, but unlike its neighbours Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria was not offered the first-class package of incentives comprising SPRING funding, DCFTA negotiations and Mobility Partnership. Actually, it was chiefly a U-turn on the Algerian side that led to a substantial strengthening of bilateral relations. In December 2011, the Algerian government took the step of agreeing to launch negotiations on an ENP Action Plan, after having resisted participating in the ENP for years since its inception. Also, and surprisingly for a state so jealous of its sovereignty, an EU Election Observation Mission was invited to monitor the parliamentary elections in May 2012. This unexpected receptivity was then reciprocated by the EU, as interest was increasing in relying on Algeria as a regional security pivot for dealing with crises in Mali and the entire Sahel region (Dennison, 2012). The apex of this upward evolution in Algeria's cooperation with the EU was the signing, in July 2013, of a memorandum of understanding on an EU-Algeria Strategic Energy Partnership, which was a long-held Algerian aspiration (Fernández-Molina, 2017a, pp. 313-314).

From this moment onwards, the Algerian eagerness to strengthen ties with the EU started to diminish, as apparent from the snail's pace of the Action Plan negotiations. The perception spread that Algeria was recovering its negotiating strength and going back to its traditional selectiveness and

assertiveness. This was confirmed by the Algerian call, in August 2015, for renegotiating the 2002 EU-Algeria Association Agreement, in force since 2005. Although justified on legitimate grounds of damage to the national economy (Fernández-Molina, 2018a, p. 332; Maggiolini & Talbot, 2016, pp. 48-49), this move risked bringing bilateral relations back to square one. The response was to launch a joint assessment of the implementation of the Association Agreement in 2016. By the time this evaluation was finalised, in March 2017, the trend in bilateral relations appeared to be positive again, for the EU-Algeria Association Council adopted Partnership Priorities (European Council, 2017) precisely at this point, and outstripping its Tunisian and Moroccan counterparts.

To recap, and as a basis for process tracing, a rough and tentative representation of the post-2011 bilateral trajectories of Maghreb-EU relations at the level of political dialogue and negotiations may be the following.

Figure 1. Bilateral trajectories of Maghreb-EU political relations, 2011-2018



Source: Author

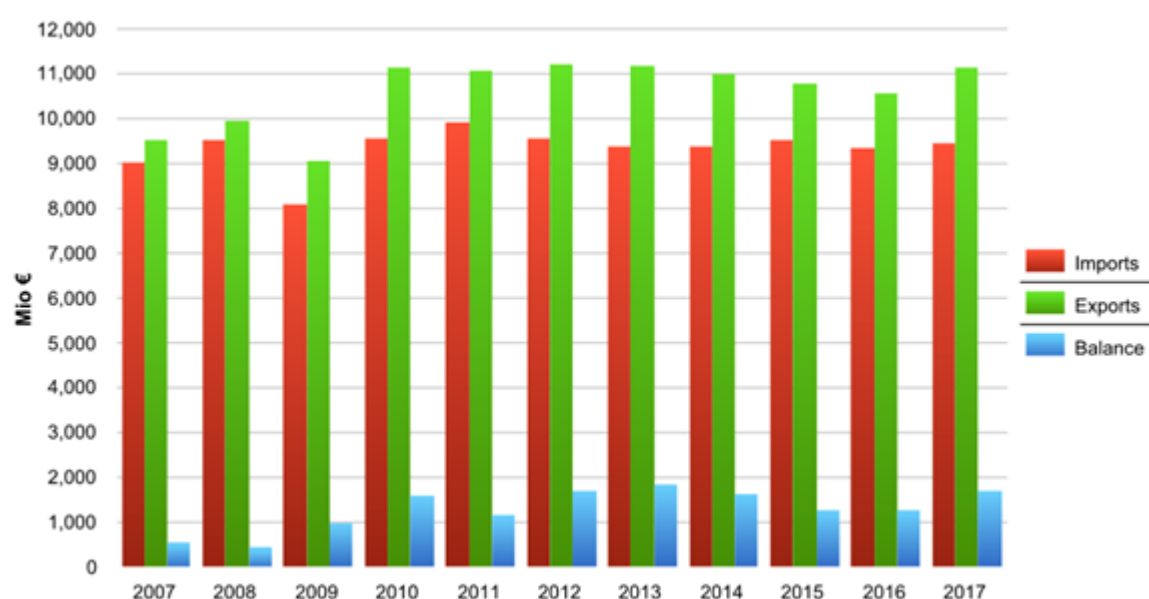
Now, moving to the analysis, what is it that explains the three diverging trajectories of Algeria's, Tunisia's and Morocco's foreign policies towards the EU since 2011, as well as the key turning points in each of them? What factors constitute drivers of change or continuity in each case?

Economic (Inter)dependence with the EU

The first possibility that needs to be explored, from a mixed approach halfway between international political economy and neoliberal IR theory, is whether any correlation can be observed between the

ups and downs of each Maghreb state's bilateral political dialogue with the EU and the evolution of the corresponding bilateral economic (inter)dependence. In the case of Tunisia, the available data shows a steady level of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) (inter)dependence with EU. The bilateral trade relationship has remained relatively balanced, in spite of the consistently higher weight of EU exports, and did not substantially deteriorate even in the context of Tunisian domestic turmoil following the 2011 revolution. Such economic predictability may be associated with the firm direction in Tunisia-EU relations and cooperation in all domains.

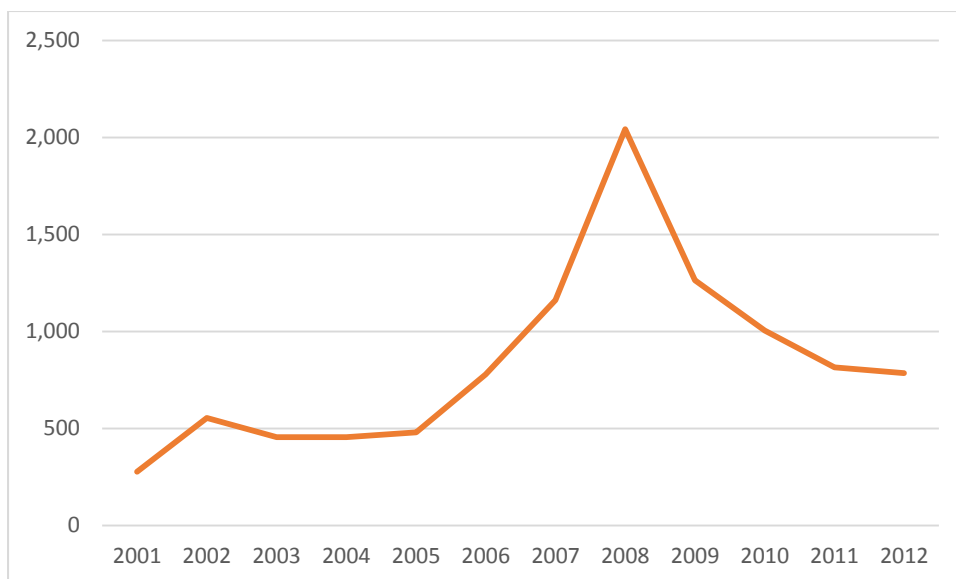
Figure 2. EU trade flows and balance with Tunisia (goods), 2007-2017



Source: European Commission (2019), with data from Eurostat Comext

Updated and comparable data on EU FDI flows into Tunisia are difficult to find, as the available bilateral FDI statistics from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) stop in 2012, but the following chart gives some indication of the post-2011 overall trend.

Figure 3. EU FDI flows into the Tunisian economy (US\$ million^[U1])



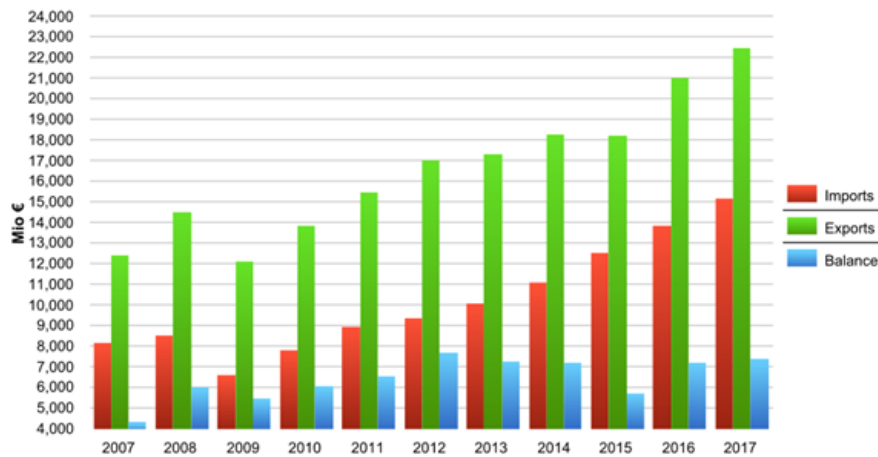
Source: UNCTAD/Bilateral FDI Statistics 2014

(<https://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/FDI%20Statistics/FDI-Statistics-Bilateral.aspx>), data processed by author

More distinct change can be observed in the EU's financial assistance to Tunisia during the post-2011 period, when it substantially rose, reaching a total of 2.4 billion euros between 2011-2017 (1.6 billion in grants and 800 million in macro-financial assistance) (European Commission, n.d.a). The average annual allocations from the ENPI and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) more than doubled from 80 million euros for 2007-2010 to 170 million euros for 2011-2015 (European Court of Auditors, 2017, p. 14). An even more dramatic increase occurred in EU official development assistance (ODA) to Tunisia at the 2011 turning point. Having consistently stood out as Tunisia's largest donor, the EU institutions provided almost 50% of total ODA to the country in 2011-2014. Tunisia was the 14th top recipient of ODA from the EU institutions and EU member states in 2014 (Maggiolini & Talbot, 2016, p.64).

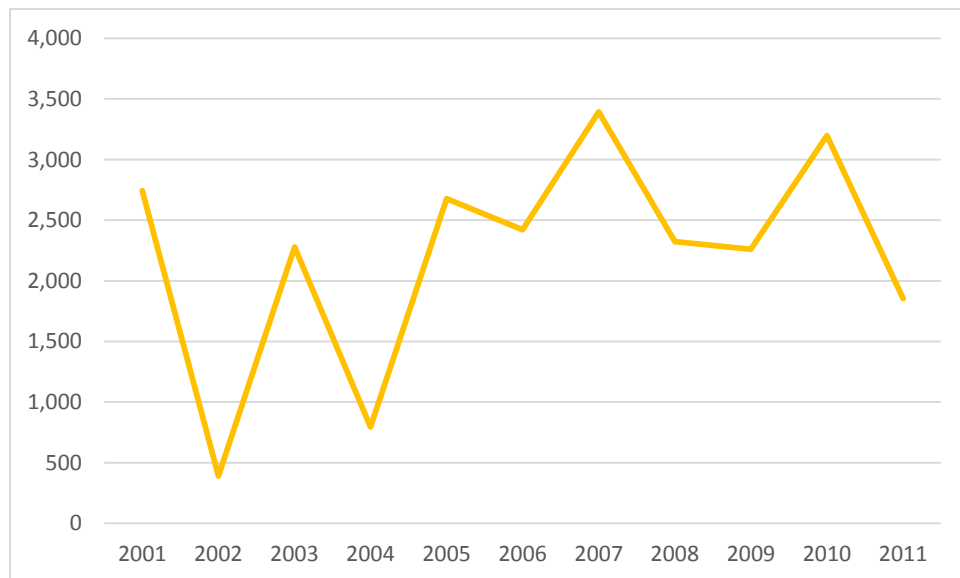
As for Morocco, the figures of bilateral trade with the EU have consistently grown in both the pre-2011 and the post-2011 years, with just one brief downturn in 2009, in the wake of the 2008 global economic and financial crisis. The recent Moroccan trade pattern with the EU differs from that of Tunisia for its marked upward trend as well as a more negative balance between the volume of exports and imports – which may be viewed as a sign of greater dependence. What both cases share is an apparent lack of direct impact of the 2011 uprisings. On the other hand, in contrast to the trade data, the Moroccan FDI dependence from the EU appears to have slightly decreased in 2013-2016, following a downward trend that had already started in 2010.

Figure 4. EU trade flows and balance with Morocco (goods), 2007-2017



Source: European Commission/Directorate-General for Trade (2018c), with data from Eurostat Comext

Figure 5. EU FDI flows into the Moroccan economy (US\$ million)



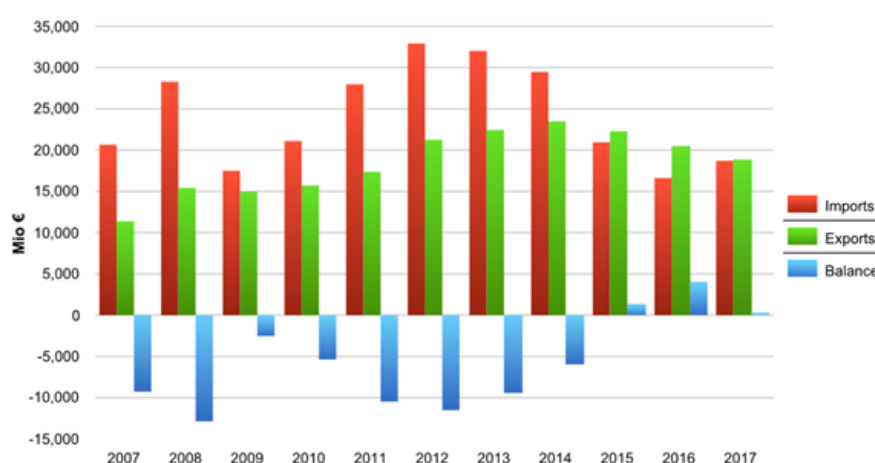
Source:

UNCTAD/Bilateral FDI Statistics 2014 (<https://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/FDI%20Statistics/FDI-Statistics-Bilateral.aspx>), data processed by author

When it comes to EU financial assistance, Morocco, which had been for years the largest recipient of funds from the ENPI and its predecessor the MEDA Programme, did not benefit from a doubling in the ENPI/ENI allocations after 2011, as did post-revolutionary Tunisia. Continuity and stability prevailed, although the Moroccan post-2011 average still increased and its annual figure peaked in 2013. Somewhat similarly, the EU's post-2011 ODA to Morocco did not grow drastically but in a sustained manner, experiencing a downturn later in 2014-2015, and a new uptick in 2016.

In the case of Algeria, unlike Tunisia and Morocco, there has been a distinct decreasing trend in both trade and FDI interdependence with the EU since 2013. This has gone hand in hand with a reversal of the country's consistently positive trade balance – the international political economy feature that has always set it apart from its neighbours – due to a pronounced drop in its exports to the EU, 95.7% of which are “mineral products” (European Commission/Directorate-General for Trade, 2018a, p. 6), i.e. hydrocarbons and their derivatives. The direct cause of these changes was the abrupt shrinking of international oil prices beginning in mid-2014, which brought them from \$80-110 per barrel in 2011-2013 to \$40-60 per barrel in 2015-2017. The toll of this “oil shock” has been massive in countries that over-depend on energy revenues such as Algeria, where “oil and gas accounted for 97% of total exports, two thirds of state revenues and one third of gross domestic product in 2014” (International Crisis Group, 2018, pp. 2-3). As regards EU FDI flows into the Algerian economy, they were already diminishing since 2009.

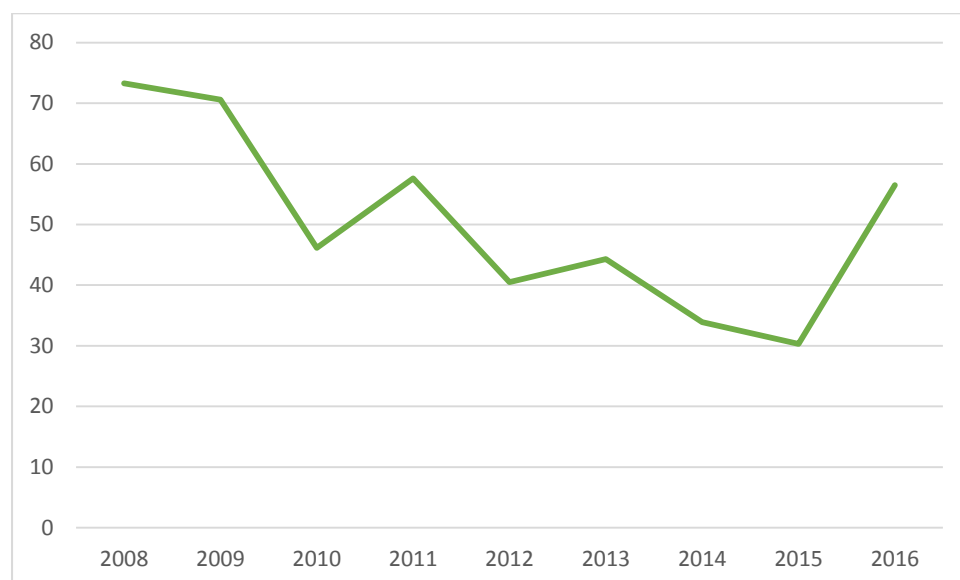
Figure 6. EU trade flows and balance with Algeria (goods), 2007-2017



Source: European Commission/Directorate-General for Trade (2018a), with data from Eurostat Comext

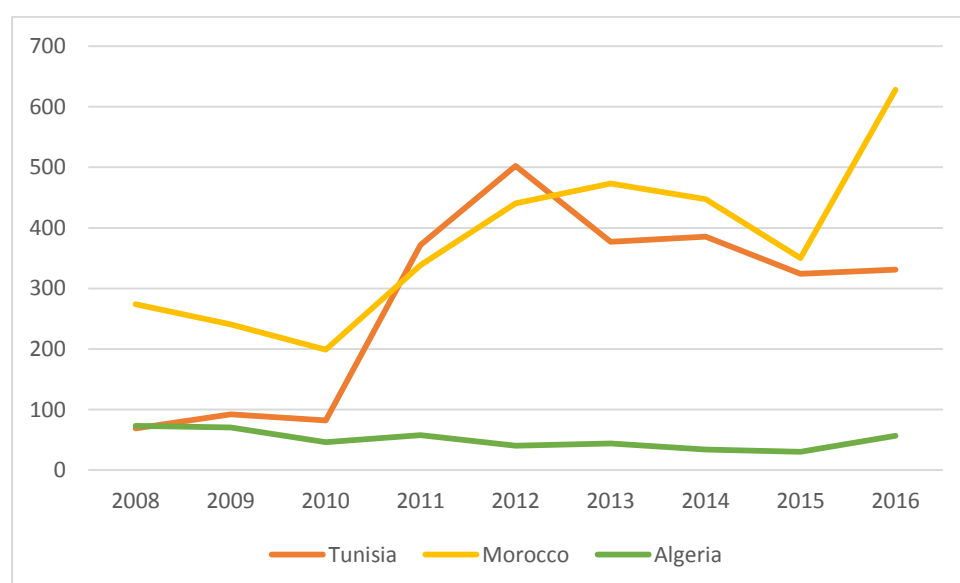
Regarding EU financial assistance, Algeria also stands out as a partial exception. Not having fully joined the ENP until 2017, the year when it concluded Partnership Priorities with the EU, the country was included as a recipient in the ENPI and the first tranche of the ENI, but received funding at a significantly lower level than Tunisia and Morocco. Commitments amounted to only €180 million under the ENPI I (2007-2010), €162 million under the ENPI II (2011-2013) and €148 million under the ENI I (2014-2017). More recently, the EU has committed an indicative allocation range of €108-132 million from the ENI for 2018-2020 (European Commission, n.d.c). The same exceptionalism applies to the EU institutions' ODA to Algeria, as can be observed in the figures below.

Figure 7. ODA disbursements from EU institutions to Algeria, 2008-2016 (US\$ million, 2016 constant prices)



Source: OECD.Stat, data processed by author

Figure 8. ODA disbursements from EU institutions to central Maghreb countries, 2008-2016 (US\$ million, 2016 constant prices)



Source: OECD.Stat, data processed by author

In sum, since 2011, Tunisia has maintained a steady degree of trade and FDI (inter)dependence with the EU, at the same time that its dependence on EU financial assistance and ODA has risen sharply. This economic data correlates with the steadily upward direction of the evolution of the bilateral relationship at the political level. In the case of Morocco, (inter)dependence with the EU has substantially grown in the trade sphere and remained stable in terms of financial assistance and ODA,

while somewhat decreasing in the domain of FDI. Overall, with FDI being the only relatively negative data, economic trends fail to explain the setback and slowdown experienced by Morocco-EU relations since 2015-2016, which seems to have distinctly political causes, as will be discussed below. As for Algeria, a country where EU financial assistance and ODA have remained quite limited, the reduction in both trade and FDI interdependence with the EU beginning in 2013 is likely to have motivated a political move away from bilateral cooperation, such as the Algerian call for renegotiating the EU-Algeria Association Agreement in 2015.

Global Power Shifts and the “Rise of the Non-West”

Now, moving back to the big structural picture of global politics, the analysis turns to examine whether the global diffusion of power and the “rise of the non-West”, which are commonly associated with the perceived crisis of the Western-based liberal international order, have played any role in the post-2011 trajectories of the central Maghreb countries’ relations with the EU. From this perspective, the key question is whether the EU’s presence and influence over this part of its southern neighbourhood is shrinking due to growing competition – in a sort of zero-sum game – from other global powers and “neighbours of the neighbours”, such as China, Russia, the GCC states and Turkey. Although there may be various parallel competition arenas, including an identity-related and normative one, this section focuses on the material dimension of these hypothetical developments.

The first indicators worth considering are changes in the Maghreb states’ trade structures between 2010 and 2017. In the case of Tunisia, it can be observed that the EU’s overwhelming dominance as a market for national exports has not only not diminished but increased from 2010 (76% of the country’s total exports to the world) to 2017 (78%). The combined weight of the following two states in the ranking, neighbouring Libya and Algeria, has barely changed over these years (7-8%), and the rest of the top ten trade partners make up for only 1-2% each. The trend is slightly different for Tunisian imports, where the EU’s share is less disproportionate and decreasing (from 62% in 2010 to 53% in 2017), and a varied range of exporters have somewhat enlarged their presence in the country. Still, even the most pushing (uz)-thriving of these, China, continues to fall short of reaching 10% of Tunisia’s total imports.

Table 3. Tunisia’s top trading partners, 2010 vs. 2017

Exports					Imports				
Partner	2010		2017		Partner	2010		2017	
	US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%		US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%
EU	12,033	76	10,553	78	EU	13,574	62	11,136	53

Libya	733	5	394	3	China	1,345	6	1,851	9
Algeria	475	3	467	4	Russia	1,034	5	479	2
USA	389	2	315	2	USA	896	4	693	3
India	307	2	103	1	Turkey	632	3	936	4
Switzerland	264	2	306	2	Algeria	622	3	748	4
Morocco	232	1	185	1	South Korea	347	2	225	1
Turkey	214	1	171	1	Japan	313	1	214	1
Brazil	116	1	17	≈ 0	Ukraine	309	1	350	2
Egypt	92	1	42	≈ 0	Libya	284	1	36	≈ 0
World	15,847		13,524		World	21,875		20,800	

Source: IMF/Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), data processed by author

In Morocco, the EU's trade share is also over well 50% and has risen between 2010 and 2017 for both exports (from 59% to 64%) and imports (from 50% to 57%). The following three largest markets for Moroccan exports, i.e. the US, Brazil and India, make up for only 13-11% altogether. Non-EU imports into the Moroccan market are more significant, but none of the EU's competitors reached the threshold of 10% in either 2010 – China (8%), US (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), Russia (4%) – or 2017 – China (9%), US (7%), Turkey (5%).

Table 4. Morocco's top trading partners, 2010 vs. 2017

Exports					Imports				
Partner	2010		2017		Partner	2010		2017	
	US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%		US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%
EU	9,809	59	15,885	64	EU	17,591	50	25,173	57
India	972	6	690	3	China	2,804	8	4,087	9
USA	602	4	1,020	4	USA	2,501	7	3,095	7
Brazil	547	3	908	4	Saudi	2,074	6	868	2

					Arabia				
Switzerland	311	2	157	1	Russia	1,244	4	968	2
Turkey	271	2	664	3	Algeria	835	2	540	1
Singapore	271	2	271	1	Brazil	761	2	719	2
Pakistan	239	1	205	1	Turkey	760	2	1,998	5
China	238	1	306	1	Iraq	710	2	≈ 0	≈ 0
Russia	170	1	190	1	India	569	2	616	1
World	16,511		24,585		World	35,139		44,567	

Source: IMF/Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), data processed by author

In Algeria, the EU's share of the total trade with the world has remained at around 50%, with the 2010-2017 trend being a mixed one of growth in terms of exports (from 49% to 59%) and decrease in terms of imports (from 51% to 44%). The Algerian trade structure's main differences from those of Tunisia and Morocco lie in its greater diversification and the much more significant weight of non-EU partners, such as China for imports – increasing from 11% in 2010 to 18% in 2017 – and the US for exports – shrinking from 24% in 2010 to 9% in 2017, though. In any case, there is no clear indication of decline of the EU's dominance.

Table 5. Algeria's top trading partners, 2010 vs. 2017

Exports					Imports				
Partner	2010		2017		Partner	2010		2017	
	US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%		US\$ m	%	US\$ m	%
EU	28,011	49	20,233	59	EU	20,431	51	19,535	44
USA	13,827	24	3,242	9	China	4,441	11	8,149	18
Canada	2,971	5	625	2	USA	2,116	5	1,749	4
Turkey	2,704	5	1,368	4	South Korea	1,975	5	1,640	4
Brazil	2,415	4	2,144	6	Turkey	1,515	4	1,967	4

India	1,565	3	871	2	Japan	1,509	4	434	1
China	1,173	2	688	2	Argentina	1,216	3	1,495	3
South Korea	1,158	2	874	3	Brazil	902	2	1,356	3
Morocco	713	1	430	1	India	772	2	960	2
Tunisia	536	1	386	1	Switzerland	588	1	335	1
World	57,000		34,372		World	40,449		44,733	

Source: IMF/Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), data processed by author

Reliable and similarly comparable data on the Maghreb states' FDI structure are hard to find (Cohen-Hadria, 2018, p. 16) – an acknowledged limitation of this paper – but the following tables provide some evidence of the relative presence of EU FDI as compared to other sources in each of them. Here the three countries' pictures are contrasting. Tunisia's is by far the most Europeanised one, for EU member states were the source of at least 75% of FDI flows into the national economy in 2017. Qatar appears as the only non-European country on the list and provided just 6% of FDI. The Moroccan FDI structure is in a sort of middle-ground situation, as it is substantially more diversified and less dominated by EU investors than Tunisia's, yet still quite Western-led. In 2017, the EU member states' combined share amounted to 42.2% of the total FDI inflows, while the US provided 21.4% and GCC states 19.3%. On the other extreme, although the data is not comparable, among the providers of FDI in Algeria for 2002-2017, Arab countries, presumably from the GCC, are the largest source (42%) and considerably outstrip EU member states (26%).

Table 6. Tunisia's FDI structure, 2017

Investment partners	% FDI inflows
France	44
Germany	10
Italy	7
Qatar	6
Spain	6
Netherlands	5

Switzerland	4
Luxembourg	3
Others	15

Source: Santander Trade Portal (<https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/tunisia/foreign-investment>), with data from Tunisian Investment Agency

Table 7. Morocco's FDI structure, 2017

Investment partners	% FDI inflows
France	31.4
USA	21.4
UAE	10.3
Netherlands	6.4
Saudi Arabia	6.1
UK	4.4
China	3.3
Qatar	2.9
Others	13.8

Source: Santander Trade Portal (<https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/morocco/foreign-investment>), with data from Foreign Exchange Office of Morocco's Ministry of Finance

Table 8. Algeria's FDI structure, 2017

Investment partners	% FDI inflows
Arab countries	42
EU	26
Non-EU Europe	19
Asia	7

America	3
Africa	2
Multinationality	1
Australia	≈ 0

Source: Algerian National Agency of Investment Development

(<http://www.andi.dz/index.php/en/declaration-d-investissement/bilan-des-declarations-d-investissement-2002-2018>), data processed by author

In short, the economic/material impact of the global “rise of the non-West” on the central Maghreb countries has been thus far limited and mixed, varying across indicators. Developments over the 2010-2017 period have not substantially altered the Maghrebi trade structures, the three of which remain distinctly dominated by exchanges with the EU, although specific situations range along a continuum – with Tunisian trade being the most heavily Europeanised, Algerian the relatively most diversified and Moroccan lying in-between. From the non-Western rising powers, the trade giant China appears as the second top trading partner for all the three countries, yet lagging hugely behind the EU. In 2017, it only represented 11.2% of world trade for Algeria, 6.4% for Morocco and 5.6% for Tunisia, being significantly more important for Algeria than for the others, and significantly more important for imports than for exports across the three cases. Russia occupies a quite modest place as 6th top trading partner for Tunisia (1.6% of world trade), 7th for Morocco (1.7%) and 9th for Algeria (1.5%). The best placed regional power is Turkey, which stands as 4th top trading partner for Tunisia (3.4% of world trade), 4th for Morocco (3.8%) and 5th for Algeria (4.2%). The GCC countries are virtually absent from the Maghreb states’ “top ten” in terms of trade, with only Saudi Arabia being the 8th top trading partner for Morocco (1.4% of world trade). Non-Western presence is definitely more important in the domain of FDI, in this case led by the GCC states. Here there is also a Tunisia-Morocco-Algeria continuum in terms of (de-) Europeanisation. The first two national FDI structures remain Western-dominated but the Algerian one appears to be notably less so. Finally, moving away from the economic sphere, a remaining question is whether global power shifts may be having greater impact on the Maghreb for their political/normative dimension than in strictly material terms.

National Security, Territoriality and Sovereignty

The lenses of classical realism in IR suggest zooming in from the big structural picture of global politics to the specific states we are dealing with and what each of them views as its national interest in terms of security, territoriality and sovereignty. For Tunisia, the chief security concern of the post-

2011 years was the spill-over of the conflict in neighbouring Libya. The situation of virtual state collapse in the wake of the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime had unleashed forced migration flows, arms trafficking and a surge of terrorist activity – including the new Libyan branch of the **Islamic state group** – across the country's uncontrolled borders. In a way, "Tunisia's 'Libyan problem' of the 2010s was the new 'Algerian problem' of the 1960s" (Fernández-Molina, 2018b, p. 8). The domestic effects of such instability included a number of high-profile attacks on Tunisian soil, which raised the spectre of transnational terrorism and home-grown radicalisation fuelling political polarisation, and ultimately derailing the fragile Tunisian transition. This was to be a sustained threat for years, although the perception of its severity would be relatively diminished after the attacks in Tunis (Bardo National Museum) and Sousse in March and June 2015. The Tunisian response consisted of redoubling efforts to secure the state's own borders and to increase regional cooperation on border security with Libya and Algeria. The EU approach in this respect largely concurred with Tunisia's, especially when the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) civilian mission EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM) was deployed in 2013-2014, in order to help build Libya's border control capacities (European External Action Service, 2018). Therefore, while bearing no direct connection with Tunisia's EU policy, if anything, concerns about regional insecurity may have positively impacted the bilateral relationship.

The linkage between relations with the EU and national security, territoriality and sovereignty was to become more convoluted in the case of Morocco. Morocco's longstanding core interest in the latter sphere is the international recognition of its de facto annexation of Western Sahara, which is seen as a non-negotiable component of national territorial integrity. This had never posed any obstacle for an ever-strengthening and ostensibly "advanced" bilateral relationship with the EU until the 2010s, when the Polisario Front's "low politics" international strategy – refocusing on the denunciation of Morocco's human rights violations and economic exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara – started to harvest its first fruits. While provoking a series of unprecedented human rights-related diplomatic crises between Morocco, on the one hand, and the UN and the US, on the other, in 2012-2013, the Sahrawi "low politics" strategy made it into the EU arena by concentrating on the issue of natural resources and the contentious legality of the de facto inclusion of Western Sahara in EU-Morocco cooperation agreements. The Polisario Front has pursued this new strategy combining parliamentary and judicial routes. Their main achievement through the former, i.e. the European Parliament's 2011 rejection of the EU-Morocco fisheries protocol, was experienced by Morocco as an unimaginable, never expected political setback, although it ultimately only had a short-lived effect in practice. Much more worrisome for Moroccan interests in the long term were the CJEU rulings on the EU-Morocco agricultural trade agreement and fisheries partnership agreement in 2015-2016 and 2018 respectively (see above): "Altogether, these cases are producing strong jurisprudence requiring the EU to start territorially differentiating between economic activities and products originating from the

internationally-recognised Morocco and the Western Sahara territory it controls, as increasingly done with Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories” (Fernández-Molina & Ojeda-García, 2019).

Accordingly, the Moroccan reaction to such unparalleled structural crisis in its much-cherished relationship with the EU has somewhat got out of the norm of the country’s traditional foreign policy orientation. Rational-choice responses to the perceived threat to national interest have included, in the first place, recourse to tactical issue-linkage and even overt threats to decrease Moroccan cooperation on migration and border control as a transit state for EU-bound migration flows. In the words of the Moroccan Minister of Agriculture and king’s strongman Aziz Akhannouch: “How do you [Europeans] want us to do the job of blocking African emigration if Europe does not want to work with us today? (...) Why are we going to continue to act as gendarmes (...)?” (Otazu, 2017). Secondly, King Mohammed VI himself put on stage the possibility of Morocco shifting alliances away from the EU, prioritising rising powers and regional partners over its longstanding postcolonial attachment. In an unusual diplomatic display, he made two consecutive state visits to Russia and China, in March and May 2016 respectively. These were followed by a series of royal “African tours” between 2016 and 2018, in the midst of a new narrative on Morocco’s so-called “new African policy” that was actively disseminated by a wave of semi-official think tank publications. It is still too early to assess the seriousness and viability of the suggested foreign policy reorientation, and the European Commission and Council are striving to square the circle by negotiating new EU-Morocco cooperation agreements that *both* meet the CJEU legal requirements and include Western Sahara. Yet, it is clear that the territorial issue has changed the course of Morocco’s EU policy after the 2015-2016 turning point. Among other things, the country has willingly given up its position as the ENP’s southern frontrunner and has not negotiated Partnership Priorities with the EU yet, unlike Algeria and Tunisia.

In the case of the Algerian authorities, the overriding security concern in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings was first and foremost one of regime security. Their perception of regime vulnerability and regional political isolation grew as like-minded authoritarian regimes fell in neighbouring Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and Islamist parties started to win elections in these countries as well as Morocco. This temporary pressure has been related to the adaptive U-turn that the Algerian attitude towards bilateral cooperation with the EU took in 2011-2012, when this state became involved in the ENP for the first time – a quite plausible rational choice with the aim of gaining international backing (Fernández-Molina, 2018a; Hernando de Larramendi & Fernández-Molina, 2015, pp. 259-261). Subsequently, a second post-2011 security challenge for Algeria was the rising instability of the Sahel in general and Mali in particular on its southern borders, most notably during the 2012-2013 Northern Mali conflict provoked by the Tuareg insurrection and transnational terrorist takeover in so-called Azawad. This was linked to relations with the EU because of the European expectation that Algeria

acted as a regional security provider, given its geographical contiguity, status as a regional military power and longstanding contacts with – or knowledge of – Tuareg and terrorist groups in the area.

As plans gained momentum for an international military intervention to help the Malian government retake the north, pressure intensified on the Algerian authorities to become involved as a regional partner. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika refused to do so and kept advocating a “political solution” to the conflict for a mix of normative grounds and rational choice reasons. The latter were driven by fear that Western intervention would further destabilise the Algerian historical backyard and terrorist activity would spill over into the country’s own territory through its lengthy and porous Saharan borders. Additionally, growing Western diplomatic courtship of Algeria rationally constituted an opportunity for this state to raise its international profile and increase its bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU and its member states. This has been hypothesised as a potential explanation for the slowdown in the Algerian pro-EU efforts after the 2011-2012 turning point (Dennison, 2012). Later on, a similar sort of pragmatic calculation ended up leading the Algerian authorities to authorise French airplanes to fly over their airspace once a military operation started in January 2013 (Hernando de Larramendi & Fernández-Molina, 2015, pp. 251-252).

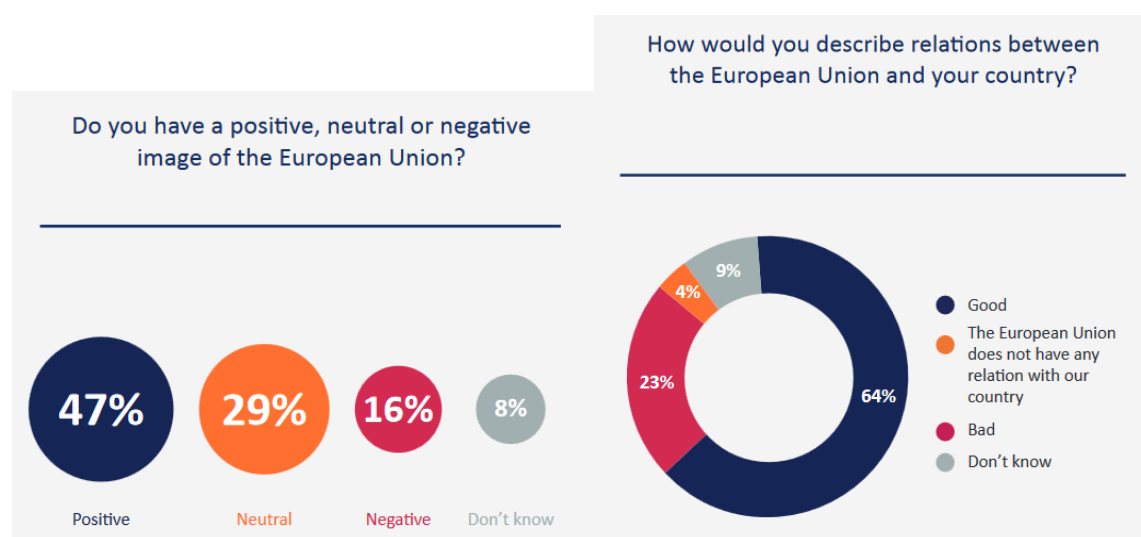
Overall, it appears that rational choices in the face of perceived challenges to national security have considerable explanatory power in accounting for specific turning points in Morocco and Algeria’s foreign policies towards the EU, though less so in the case of Tunisia, where the bilateral trajectory has been much more linear. Aside from this, the relationship between these security concerns and relations with the EU has been different in each Maghreb country’s case: one of convergence for Tunisia, clash for Morocco and opportunity for Algeria.

National Identities and Foreign Policy Roles

Finally, it is important to consider dynamics beyond rational choice, such as the impact of the identity-related and normative factors prioritised by constructivism upon the central Maghreb countries’ recent foreign policy trajectories vis-à-vis the EU. A particularly interesting driver of foreign policy change that falls within this category is role conflict. Based on an understanding of foreign policy roles as social constructions resulting from the interaction between an actor/nation state’s self-conceptions (*ego*) and external expectations or prescriptions (*alter*) regarding its place in the world, there is the possibility of contradiction between two or more roles stemming from different domestic or international sources, or formulated in different historical contexts. Role conflict may result in foreign policy dysfunctions and, for better or worse, is also a key driver of foreign policy change (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012, pp. 10-11).

In the case of Tunisia, the main instance of role conflict observed in the post-2011 context has not been directly related to the EU. It concerned the politics of foreign debt and the contradictory pressures in this respect stemming from the global and domestic spheres in the aftermath of the revolution. The dilemma was between acting as a “poster child for the IMF” – accepting new borrowing, structural reforms and austerity measures – and the “success story of the Arab Spring” – prioritising socioeconomic inclusion, job creation and pro-poor policies in order to stabilise the democratic transition process (Fernández-Molina, 2018b, p. 3). Tunisia’s EU policy did not pose such difficult quandaries, as post-2011 domestic political elites and public opinion maintained a quite large favourable consensus on the EU, with 76% of Tunisians having a positive or neutral image thereof, and 64% describing the bilateral relationship as good in some polls (EU Neighbours, 2017). Brussels’ voiced “support and recognition to the Tunisian people and their democratic aspirations” reinforced the country’s longstanding foreign policy role as a “model student of the EU” in a sort of identity-based virtuous circle.

Figure 9. Answers to 2017 opinion poll about Tunisian perceptions of the EU

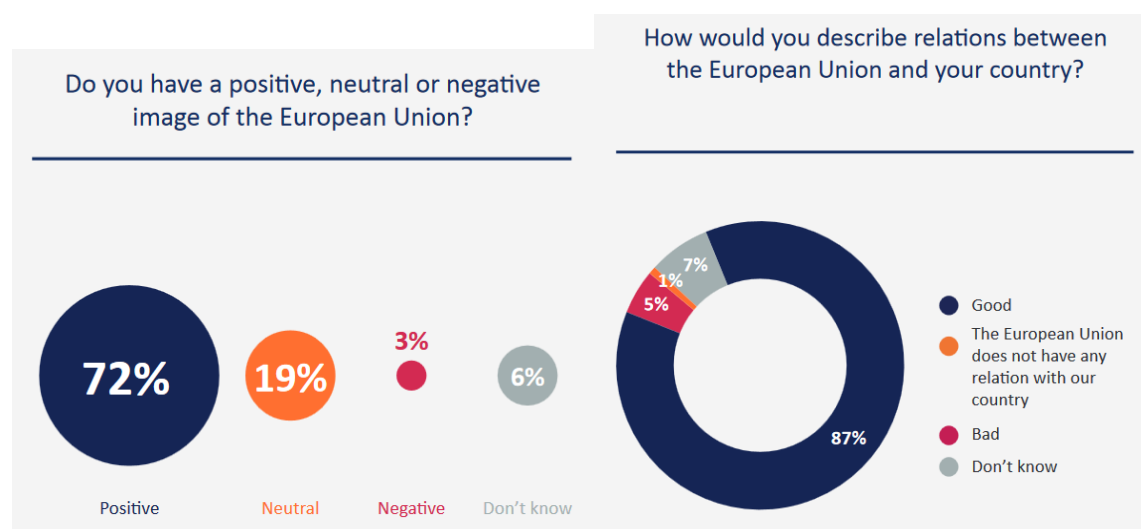


Source: EU Neighbours (2017c)

By contrast, in the case of Morocco, since 2015-2016 the CJEU rulings and related developments have provoked an outstanding role conflict between the country’s two core and longstanding foreign policy roles, thus far compatible, as “champion of national territorial integrity” and “model student of the EU” (Fernández-Molina, 2017c, p. 190). Besides rational-choice responses, the Moroccan official reaction has included a good deal of rhetorical action and normative contestation. Recent speeches by King Mohammed VI have displayed an anticolonial tone unusual for this country, questioning the imposition of European/Western conditionality on African states, disputing positive perceptions of the Arab Spring and its consequences, highlighting the European contradictions and failure to live up to their own norms and values in migration policies, emphasising alternative normative references such

as the GCC countries and stressing the norm of national sovereignty (Ministere de la Culture et de la Communication, 2016; Ministere de la Culture et de la Communication, 2017). However, according to the available poll data, the suggested normative detachment from the EU at the regime/elite level does not seem to be supported by a majority of Moroccan public opinion. The latter appears to persist in its traditional positive appraisal of the EU, its relations with Morocco and its effects on Morocco's stability (on Moroccan public opinion attitudes towards international relations and the EU, see also ArabTrans, 2016a, pp. 72-76). Furthermore, in both Moroccan and Tunisian public opinion, the approval rate for leaders of rising powers such as China and Russia is no better than that of the EU.

Figure 10. Answers to 2017 opinion poll about Moroccan perceptions of the EU

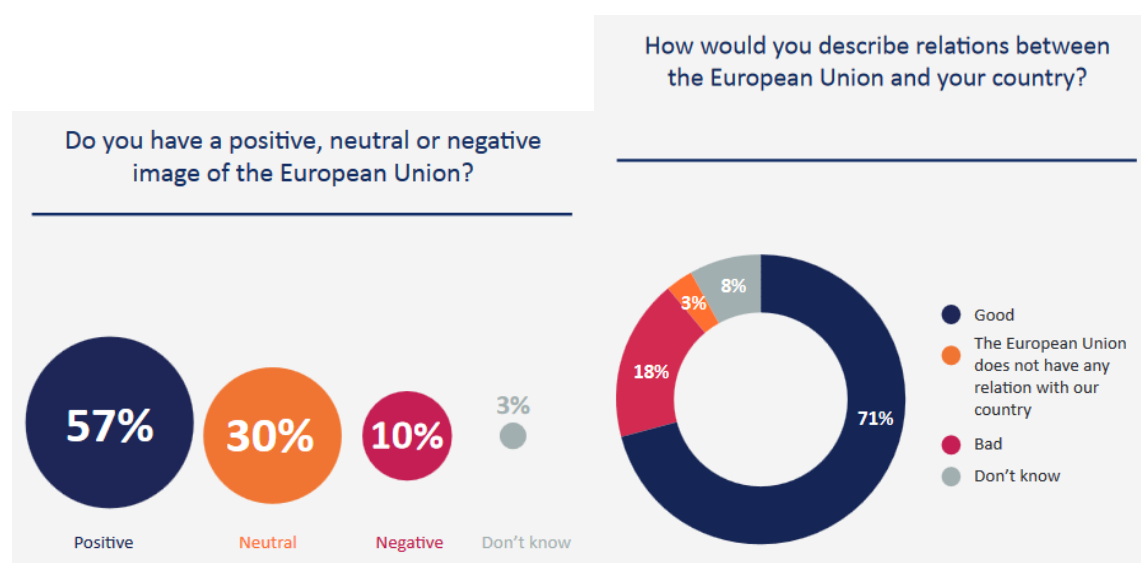


Source: EU Neighbours (2017b)

In the case of Algeria, two instances of role conflict can be observed in the post-2011 period. The first of them is the tension between the country's deeply embedded postcolonial role as anti-Western and non-aligned "third world leader" – which has historically led it to act as a sort of "bad student" with a long record of "awkwardness" (Darbouche 2008, p. 372) in its relations with the EU – and the possibility of becoming a "good student" following the 2011-2012 turning point. The latter role and the engagement with the ENP were also at odds with Algeria's role as a "sovereignty champion" strictly opposed to any form of conditionality and interference in domestic affairs, which seemed to resurface with the call for the Association Agreement to be renegotiated in 2015. However, the EU was able to ease this contradiction by launching the joint assessment of the implementation of the Association Agreement and swiftly negotiating Partnership Priorities with Algeria. Regarding the 2017 Partnership Priorities, it has been rightly pointed out that, rather than the content of the policy document, "what is more important is that the EU appears to have responded to the criticism of the irrelevance of the prior frameworks for engagement with Algeria." "Accommodating in this way the 'Algerian specificity' in the overall ENP framework is therefore a prime example of greater

differentiation avowed in the 2015 revision of the ENP” (Ovádek & Wouters, 2017, p. 16). The second case of role conflict where the Algerian struggled to strike a pragmatic balance pitted, on the one hand, Algeria’s self-conception as “third world leader” and “sovereignty champion”, and on the other, the European/Western demand for it to act as a “regional security pivot” during the 2012-2013 Northern Mali conflict, including support for an international military intervention. Interestingly, according to existing poll data, Algerian public opinion perceptions of the EU are as predominantly positive as those of Tunisians and Moroccans.

Figure 11. Answers to 2017 opinion poll about Algerian perceptions of the EU



Source: EU Neighbours (2017a)

Conclusion: De-Europeanisation?

By way of conclusion, from the four sets of factors considered in process tracing, the strong economic (inter)dependence with the EU appears to have remained largely a driver of continuity in the central Maghreb countries’ EU policies since 2011. The only significant instance of change of this origin is the reduction in Algeria-EU trade and FDI interdependence in the context of the 2014 “oil shock”, which may have been associated with the ensuing Algerian call for renegotiating the EU-Algeria Association Agreement. As regards global power shifts and the “rise of the non-West”, their impact on the Maghreb has been so far limited and mixed in its economic/material dimension. The Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian trade structures did not significantly change between 2010 and 2017, and remain heavily dominated by exchanges with the EU – with China lagging hugely behind – although non-Western and especially GCC presence is much more relevant in terms of FDI. The drivers of change that explain specific turning points in each country’s bilateral relationships with the EU are mostly rational choices in the face of perceived challenges to national security, territoriality and

sovereignty in the classical realist sense, as well as identity tensions resulting from foreign policy role conflicts. In such cases, and going back to the big structural picture, the putative decline of the Western-based liberal international order, including the EU's "normative power" over its neighbourhood, may be providing increased opportunities for the normative and rhetorical disengagement of longstanding "model students" such as Morocco. This could be viewed as a potential scenario of normative "de-Europeanisation" following in the steps of Turkey (Aydın-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016), yet with the paradox that the material structure of the country's heavy (inter)dependence with the EU remains largely unchanged. In other words, global power shifts may be having greater impact on the Maghreb for their political/normative dimension than in strictly material terms. And if there is such thing as de-Europeanisation in the Maghreb, we are mainly talking about "de-Europeanisation through discourse" (Aydın-Düzgit, 2016).

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